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ABSTRACT

This document examines incentives and obstacles to partnerships between nonprofit organizations and community colleges. Aside from some service learning collaborations, partnerships between community colleges and nonprofit groups are rare. Reasons include: (1) many community college administrators bring a private-sector orientation with them from earlier jobs; (2) recent nonprofit scandals stimulated fear of new government restrictions; and (3) the nonprofit sector is misunderstood and underappreciated. Nonprofit organizations include service organizations, charities, foundations, healthcare, environmental groups, cultural associations, community development organizations, churches, and youth organizations. Nonprofits tend to be: (1) vital and socially conscious, fulfilling missions that mesh well with those of community colleges; (2) a significant economic factor, contributing eight percent of the gross domestic product, employing ten percent of the workforce, and generating approximately $700 billion in annual revenues; and (3) involved with large potential student populations, already organized around common desires and needs. Community colleges are natural partners to nonprofits that offer facilities, potential students, and significant funding sources. If community colleges do not pursue partnerships with nonprofit organizations, they will be neglecting a vital, growing component of their communities at their own peril. Contains 11 references. (PGS)

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As Competition Increases, Community Colleges Would Do Well to Do Good

Canvas the mission, values, and purposes statements of community colleges and you find the mantras: "The mission of X Community College is to serve our community"; "X Community College responds to the needs of the community"; "Community service is integral to X Community College." The claims are at best only partly true. Community colleges are not energetically serving a vital, growing component of their communities; in these times of increasing competition, they neglect it at their own peril. That community component, increasingly important and blatantly disregarded, is the nonprofit sector.

The nonprofit sector encompasses a diverse assortment of organizations both small and large that are woven into towns and cities. Service organizations, charities, foundations, healthcare, environmental and cultural associations, community-development organizations, churches, youth organizations-anywhere people's needs or desires are found, the nonprofit sector is there. From Boys and Girls Club and nonprofit hospitals to a battered women's shelter and Soroptomists, the nonprofit sector provides all types of activities initiated by people who engage in collective purposes to meet needs they believe are important.

The nonprofit sector's role in meeting those needs and strengthening the fabric of our communities is indispensable. Former senator and presidential candidate Bill Bradley says

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"neither government, the domain of law, nor the market, governed by economic self-interest, can itself make for sustained civilization" (qtd. in Manzo, 1998, p. 1). And according to Peter Drucker, most every significant improvement in American life is rooted in the nonprofit sector, including the eradication of slavery, child labor, and racial discrimination and advances in education, medicine, and technology (qtd. in Manzo, 1998). That 90 percent of all nonprofits were formed since the end of World War II (Windmueller, 1998) suggests the sector's vitality, a vitality that should be celebrated given that the for-profit and government sectors simply cannot or will not meet pressing community needs. David Pierce, president of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), points out that the revitalization of communities requires the integral involvement of the nonprofit sector because the accomplishments of governmental assistance are difficult to quantify and private-sector sponsorship requires immediate returns (1996). To Pierce, community college partnership with the nonprofit sector in the interest of attaining community development is not only possible but essential. This is consistent with the AACC/Kellogg Foundation Beacon College Project, whose philosophy is that community development should be one of the primary concerns of community colleges (AACC/Kellogg, 1996).

Aside from some encouraging service learning collaborations, however, partnerships between community colleges and nonprofit

groups are rare. Ironically, the neglect is occurring at the very time community colleges should exploit in-their-backyard niches that ever-increasing competitors, on-line and otherwise, cannot fill. The University of Phoenix's on-line enrollment jumped almost 60 percent in fiscal 1999 (Carlson, 1999), but the growth isn't the result of actively seeking to discover how to help the pockets of unique and often nonvocal populations embedded in communities, populations orbiting around nonprofit associations. These populations run the gamut from teenagers in American Youth Soccer Organization leagues to people in shelters for the homeless, and they represent promise and potential for community colleges. The groups and organizations of the nonprofit sector and the people they serve should be seen by community colleges as already identified and preassembled groups of learners who gravitated to a place where their common desires and needs can be met. It is as if classrooms of eager, homogenous students are waiting for the educational expertise community colleges can furnish. Put coarsely, every client and volunteer of a nonprofit organization can be seen as a completed registration form.

The types of partnerships between community colleges and the nonprofit sector suggest the vast potential for community renewal and community college growth. Our community colleges should be involved with the teaching of clients of nonprofit organizations, such as offering a goal-setting seminar to fatherless teenagers

in the Big Brothers/Little Brothers program. They should provide training for leaders of nonprofit organizations, such as presenting a seminar on leading meetings to the officers of a newly formed homeowners' association. Who better than community colleges to teach the volunteers of nonprofit organizations, such as a class on battered-women's syndrome for people who volunteer at a battered-women's shelter? And community colleges and their skilled faculty and staff should assist nonprofit groups' organizationally, such as facilitating a strategic planning meeting for an environmental group whose goal is to beautify the community. They should schedule classes at nonprofit organizations' sites, possibly offering genealogy to a church's senior-citizen group at the church's recreation hall. Many other forms of partnerships are conceivable.

A common business precept asserts that satisfied customers tell their friends about positive experiences, essentially making recommendations to people they know. More effective than advertising, these endorsements cultivate customers. Community college partnerships with nonprofits would have the same effect. The clients and volunteers of the nonprofit sector, most of whom who have strong local ties, will develop goodwill toward the colleges because of their community-based activities and talk to others about them; not only are they likely to begin or continue programs at the colleges, but so will people who hear their endorsements. Responsiveness to local needs builds reputation

and attracts students; it simply makes no sense altruistically and economically to not aggressively partner with and support the ethical work of our communities' nonprofit sectors.

So why is community college partnership with the nonprofit sector so shamefully insignificant? Why are community college workforce-development initiatives to serve the needs of business and industry common but social-capital initiatives to serve the civic needs of towns scarce? One reason is the private-sector orientation of many community college deans and administrators who themselves came to the schools from for-profit backgrounds. Another reason is fear of new government restrictions, the result of recent high-profile scandals in the nonprofit sector. The most significant reason, however, is that the nonprofit sector is misunderstood and underappreciated. According to Peter Manzo, executive director of the Center for Nonprofit Management, the nonprofit sector contributes 8 percent of the gross domestic product, employs 10 percent of the workforce, and generates approximately $700 billion in annual revenues. Manzo says that although "Nonprofit civic and charitable groups touch us in all aspects of our lives...most of us discount our reliance upon them" (1998, p. 1). Yet the relevance of the nonprofit sector continues to expand. According to Elizabeth Boris, director of the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, "The devolution of federal government responsibilities to the state and local level may bring opportunities for nonprofits to play

larger roles in planning and decision-making. Welfare reform is already generating new community coalitions...." (1998, p.3). And according to Jerry Murphy, dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, some public schools in the future may be operated by nonprofit agencies (1999). That people are interested in philanthropic and community-based activities cannot be disputed. For instance, more than 74 percent of the nation's college freshmen performed volunteer work in the fall of 1998 (Chronicle, 1999). Even Peter Drucker believes that while the 20th century was the century of business, the 21st century will be the century of the social sector (Pollack, 1999). And according to Professor William Galston, School of Public Affairs, the University of Maryland, 72 percent of Americans think that the country's social problems can best be solved through stronger partnerships between the public and nonprofit sectors (1999). Community colleges' ability to deliver services locally and their commission to contribute to community problem solving makes them logical entities to lead community-reconstituting efforts that people desire. These efforts, aggressive, convincing, and directed toward the disregarded but increasingly important nonprofit sector, will ultimately serve the colleges' interests.

Such partnerships have in fact occurred. The Building a Healthy Mesa program linked Mesa Community College, the United Way, a school district, and the Chamber of Commerce together to develop approaches to issues confronting the community and its

neighborhoods ("Building," 1999). The Community College of Aurora's partnership with the nonprofit Rocky Mountain Mutual Housing Association (RMMHA) and Goodwill Industries provided GED preparation of high school dropouts while paying them to help renovate one of RMMHA's newly acquired apartment buildings. The money in the form of government and private grants is available to make such large partnerships and many smaller ones happen. That donations to charities increased by 16 percent in 1998 (CNN, 1999) suggests that people clearly desire renewed communities. What's needed by community colleges is the vision and courage to do well by doing right, or barring that, be pragmatic enough to apply the Gretzky Principle and skate to where the puck will be.

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